

REENGAGING HISTORY WITH HARLENE ANDERSON: NOSEY ROSIE *GOES!* PART I

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Harlene Anderson was invited to explore the history of her own biography through the following conversation. She was encouraged to reflect on significant relationships that she enjoyed with people who may have contributed to the values and ethics that she brings to her personal and professional life today. Diana Carleton and Caroline Tremblay were invited to assume **witnessing positions**, making it possible for them to reflect on the conversation, commenting from time to time on what caught their attention, or what moved them. We were able to witness Harlene's journey, evolving through time, illuminating **significant relationships** and their contribution to the shaping of her **values, ethics, and philosophy**. While reflecting on this journey with Harlene, we became aware of the adventurous quality of her life during that time, filled with excitement, anticipation, and challenge. This active reengagement with her history also made visible the persistence and adaptability necessary to remain true to the values and ethics of those evolving practices in the face of normalizing **pressures to "fit in" with the existing standards of psychology and psychiatry at the time**. We were able to appreciate the revolutionary ways in which Harlene and her colleagues would listen to people's stories and how they would respond to them. This retrospective inquiry illuminates some of the movements, themes, and development of the particular ideas and ethics that constitute what is currently recognized as **postmodern collaborative-dialogic practices**.

JIM: Harlene, my hope for this conversation with you is that you are able to reflect on the values that were brought forward from your personal history that have contributed to the philosophy, values, and practices and that you currently

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bring to your work and personal life. I'll be interested in what stands out for you and resonates for you as you look back into your history. Who contributed more significantly to your life? What events were more significant or pivotal? What remains in a liminal state? However, there may be other interesting and uncharted territories to explore as the conversation evolves. I'm happy to journey with you to those areas as well. Does this proposal have any interest to you?

HARLENE: Sure, sure. We'll see what history we can create, over and over again, recreating histories and memories.

J: I think it's important that your legacy and others' legacies that have contributed to non-pathologizing ways of viewing people and being with people continue to be acknowledged, enlivened, and sustained.

H: Thank you, and, again, I am grateful to you for having this idea.

J: Thank you for responding to the idea. Before we get started, I'd like to propose a tentative plan for how to have our conversation. Of course, you can change it, bail on it, or choose another preferred direction for the conversation at any time. I would like to ask some provisional questions. It could be that I am asking some questions that may light up an idea, or generate new meaning, or take us in a particular direction. It could also be that the question could be asked in a better way. Please, chime in. If you resonate with something that could help pull on the kind of story, people, or events in the past that influenced you to get you where you are now, I am inviting you to bring that forward.

Diana, I'm asking you to assume a witnessing position. From time to time I would like to turn to you and ask you to reflect on what caught your attention in this conversation. By the way, I consider it a gift that you're able to be part of this experience because you're such a long-time colleague and friend of Harlene's.

DIANA: Long-time.

H: We will not say how long.

D: We were 12 when we started, right?

H: We were that old?

J: I'm guessing you're going to add a unique richness to this experience. Because you've known Harlene for such a long time, it may help to step back, and use a sort of postmodern curiosity, as a reflective practice.

D: Well, I never know. I've known her long enough to know that . . .

J: . . . how is this proposed plan with both of you? Is this okay so far?

H: Sounds fine, absolutely.

J: Is there anything you want to add, change, or adjust about the proposal at this point?

H: Now one thing I often talk about is that I don't think of questions being posed as needing to be "answered." I think of them as invitations to starting points in conversations, which I think is what you're saying.

J: Thank you. That was a much clearer way of putting it. Can we begin?

H: Yeah, maybe I shouldn't say I think that's what you're saying. Maybe I should say it's similar to what you're saying.

J: Actually, it is what I'm saying. I read a number of your past interviews, articles you authored, and your book [Anderson, 1997] *Conversation, Language, and Possibilities: A Postmodern Approach to Therapy*. I began with the interview that Tapio Mailen [2004] conducted with you and then preceded to read an article that, ironically, you wrote for *JST* in 2001, "Ethics and Uncertainty: Brief Unfinished Thoughts."

H: Oh yeah, yeah.

J: Although that article was published in 2001, I'm guessing a lot of the philosophy and values expressed in it are still relevant today. Is that reasonable to assume?

H: Yes.

J: What I appreciated about the article was how clear and lucid you were in stating your philosophical stance. You said that your collaborative philosophy and practices reflect a view of ethics that have been historically, culturally, contextually, communally, and linguistically created and that your view of ethics is situated in a postmodern backdrop. You said that the postmodern, broadly speaking, offers a different way of thinking about the nature of meaning and knowledge and that to develop the transformation of that knowledge is a communal process. So I'm guessing that this reference to ethics also refers to values, and the social construction of identity and how we see ourselves. I'm guessing it refers to what's important to us that we want to hold close to us. How am I doing with my understanding of your expressions in that article? Is this okay so far?

H: I think so.

J: Good, so with that in mind, what I'm interested in is how your philosophy, view of ethics, and values have been historically, culturally, contextually, communally, and linguistically created in your own history. When you look back in time as far as you can, who is the first person you remember having the most significant influence that got you thinking towards your present beliefs about your values and view of ethics? Or perhaps it wasn't a person that first influenced you to be able to think about your present philosophy, values, and ethics in this way. It could have been an event or a particular context you experienced.

H: Perhaps first I can make a brief comment about ethics. Because I do think that everything that we do is an expression of an ethic, which, of course has been created and recreated over time. I think of that in my personal life and in my professional life. That's whether it's the way one speaks, or the way one acts, or the way one silently interprets someone else's words, that there is always an ethical component to these. We're always taking an ethical position; this could be associated with postmodern philosophy or social construction theory, but it's the way that I think and what I believe. But, in terms of values, I would say that my family and my parents in particular really largely influenced a lot of my basic values about who I am as a person. I'm the older of two daughters. My father's family was from Sweden and my mother's family was from Germany. They were always what I would consider to be very thoughtful, kind, and generous people. They were very encouraging and never dis-encouraging. My parents were very influential just in

terms of the kind of atmosphere and environment that they created. On my father's side and somewhat on my mother's side there is a long list generationally of what one might call self-starters or entrepreneurs who started their own businesses. My father owned his own business and my mother worked alongside him in it. They had a very good work ethic, although they spent a lot of time with the family. When I said they were very generous and thoughtful people, they were kind of behind the scenes at the elementary school where I went. If the principal happened to mention some child needed glasses and the family couldn't afford them, they were there to provide them with that. There was never any public acknowledgment that they accepted. It was simply a gracious attitude. My house was always the house where all the kids came, because they loved my parents.

J: What effect did that expression of generosity have on the shaping of your life as you were growing up?

H: I think that I just have grown up as a generous person. I think of myself as a generous person. I think of myself as a thoughtful person most of the time, not all the time. I wouldn't say that. I'm appreciative and I notice small things and often remember those things. It may be something small that someone did or someone said that might come back at a later time.

J: So one thing they contributed to your life was helping you to notice small things, particular details of interactions?

H: I think so. Not that they would point this out, but things didn't go unnoticed, so to speak. **They would notice things. My father was especially observant.**

J: And that's something you've been able to carry forward into your life.

H: I think so. I've never thought about that before this moment, but I think that's one way of being, in terms of noticing, which I think is important in my work. I think that is also connected to **not knowing**, as I'm sitting here thinking about it. To be able to notice things that maybe you haven't noticed before, or haven't been expecting, or just small subtleties rather than entering a situation and thinking ahead of time that I already know exactly how it's going to be and what it's going to be and who you're going to meet because you've met them before.

J: Yes, could it be based on some grand narrative about who a person is and what they need, like a sole support single-parent mom could be seen as overly involved with her oldest child.

H: Right, and all the things that most psychotherapists and family psychotherapists are taught, they are taught to **know ahead of time and to be able to identify people and place them in categories and respond to them as types and kinds of people with types or kinds of problems that they have read about or met before.** In other words, they work from a recipe to address the person or thing in front of them.

J: It seems to me that not-knowing, non-normative space that moves away from categorizing and othering people is an ability made possible by a philosophical shift that has had a significant effect in moving this work forward. As far back as the 1950s the MRI [Mental Research Institute] began to move away from that individual pathologizing view of people. Later on Insoo Kim Berg, Steve deShazer, Michael

White, and many others worked diligently to support this non-pathologizing philosophy. By the way, so many good people have passed in a short period of time at a younger age—another reason that it's important to sustain this way of thinking. Your teaching continues to sustain a non-pathologizing philosophy of being with people. What do you suppose it was that your parents were able to contribute to your life that made it possible for you to have this ability to notice the details and to stay in a not-knowing position?

H: I think to be respectful of people who are different and particularly respectful of people who are not as fortunate as one might be. This is just a very small example. As I look back on it I remember that we had a housekeeper, and my mother would go pick her up and take her home and she rode in the front seat. We had a bay house and sometimes she would come down and spend a night at the bay house and go fishing on the pier. She was like part of the family. That's just a small example.

J: Are you saying that your parents were able to make distinctions, where often it gets blurred between those taken-for-granted categories, and they were able to decide it can be this alternative way, which may be outside taken-for-granted understandings about people's identities? Is that one thing you carried forward, this value of respect for difference, the ability to make distinctions about people that are not founded on a deficit-focused discourse?

H: I would hope so.

J: If your parents were here now, what would they say you contributed to their life? (Laughter)

H: I guess I don't know what words, which words they would use, but something like joy and happiness and the occasional surprise.

J: Occasional surprise?

H: Yeah, yeah, they would say they're very proud of me and my sister as well.

J: What's your sister's name?

H: Carol.

J: What does Carol do now?

H: She owns her own business. She has a staffing company in Houston which she has had for probably 25 years at least.

J: Is that Carol owns her own business an example of being an entrepreneur and perhaps holding a value of autonomy that you were referring to earlier?

H: Yes, when you're autonomous you can be your own boss and create as best one can your own rules and guidelines.

J: So, Carol kind of caught it as well?

H: I think so.

J: Harlene, as you talk about these values and ethics of respect for people who are different, people who are not as fortunate, your ability to notice details and nuances and assume a not-knowing position, I get curious about how you managed to resist taken-for-granted discourses that support the pathologizing and categorizing of people's identities.

H: It's just something I absorbed by the way my parents were in the world with people. They would sometimes say, "You don't have to be like other people. You don't have to do what other people do." In other words they really promoted being an individual and an independent thinker.

J: So, were they teaching you how to step back and to be a critical thinker in a way?

H: I think so.

J: That seems like a gift. Would you say they helped you to be able to think about thinking?

H: Uh huh.

J: Who in your past, could be either your family or someone else who is significant in your life, would be the least surprised to hear you speaking the way you are speaking right now, and to witness how you turned out in your life?

H: The least surprised (chuckle)? I don't know. I think that people who knew my family, knew my parents, would not be surprised. Or, people that I grew up with.

J: They wouldn't be surprised

H: I don't think so. I don't have a lot of connections at all with people that I grew up with. Everybody went in very different directions. Occasionally I go to a high school reunion and that's always fun, but I don't talk about what I do professionally at all in those situations.

J: So, moving from growing up in your family, who would be other significant people who may not routinely stand out? It could even be just a moment or an experience that may have influenced your thinking through an "aha" moment, or a realization, or a pivotal moment.

H: Well, there are always a lot of "aha" kind of turning-point moments, where I might hear someone say something or notice something that they're doing that catches my attention. Then I make a note of it and I kind of incorporate it. There have been a lot of those. They could be something formally like reading a book, attending a conference. Or, it could be something informally like gathering with friends, or in a committee meeting talking about something and someone says something in a way I think was a very interesting way of saying it.

I think the most influential person professionally, and also as a friend, was Harry Goolishian. He was my mentor for years and years. And speaking of people who died very early, unfortunately he died very early.

J: How old was Harry when he died?

H: He was 67. So, yes, Harry, and then other people who were kind of in the circle of influence of course would be Lynn Hoffman, who I always thought of as a role model, even before I even met her personally. Then of course Tom Andersen, and that's the trio I'm thinking of in terms of people I had significant relationships and interactions with. Early on at a distance, historically and conceptually [Gregory] Bateson and another trio, who were the early MRI group, influenced me.

J: Who would that be? I don't want to assume to know who the trio is.

H: [Paul] Watzlawick, [John] Weakland, and [Richard] Fisch. But, mostly Weakland.

J: What was it about John Weakland that you were interested in?

H: He could be so subtle and could say something that would just catch your attention, in a way that really hit the nail on the head. This may sound very funny and I haven't thought about this before, but I had similar experiences with him and Gianfranco Cecchin. They were very, very different personalities and styles. But, the way they thought, the way they responded to things, particularly with Gianfranco. If you could get beyond the provocation of some of his responses, there was always a jewel of an idea there, a fresh way of thinking of something. What a really great way to think about this. I like that idea.

J: How did you know Gianfranco?

H: I knew him fairly well. Harry and I and our colleagues had a lot of exchanges with him. We never went to Milan for training, or that kind of thing. The first time I saw the Milan team in person was in the '80s. We got to know him and Luigi Boscolo at that time. There was a time when a group of the Irish women, Imelda McCarthy and Nollaig Byrne and Monica McGoldrick, gathered about 20 people together in what they would call team conferences or team meetings. They had one that I think may have been their second one in Ireland, and they invited several teams. Harry and I were there. The Irish people were there. Monica and some of her colleagues, Gianfranco Cecchin, and Luigi Boscolo. Lynn Hoffman and Tom Andersen were there, as was Tom's colleague Anna-Margrete Flam, and Klaus Deissler from Germany was there with a colleague. These were people with whom we had fragmented connections and at that time we were all interested in similar directions. That was the first time that I had met some of them. In terms of the MRI group, I go back to Bateson. His writings have been very influential, but I only met him one time.

J: But, you did meet him.

H: I did meet him one time. One of the things that the early Galveston team that I was part of always did was, if there was someone doing something that we had heard about, or writing something we had read and we were interested in meeting them, we contacted them and then we arranged to meet them. So Bateson was doing a conference at a hotel somewhere in Kansas, I think. So, we just flew up and went to the conference. This is the same way we met Brad Keeney. We had read some of his writings and knew he was very interested in Bateson's work. So, we just got on the phone, called him, and met him in an airport hotel, which was some place in the Midwest as well.

J: You would take initiative to meet significant thinkers and have a conversation with them.

H: We would do that, yes. We got Humberto Maturana to come to Galveston for a week. I think you were around then [referring to Diana]. We organized conferences and invited people we wanted to learn from. Gianfranco Cecchin and Luigi Boscolo came to Galveston several times. We also met them in various parts of

the world. I think of my professional community, my academic community, my theoretical community, as spread around the world. They are not relationships that have been continuous, in terms of continuous connections through daily work, but we were always finding ways to be together or taking time to be together, in whatever way that might be. We organized in the middle '80s what we called the Galveston symposiums.

J: Yes, I heard a lot about those. They were legendary.

H: This idea came from a conversation that Harry and Lynn and I were having. We said why don't we just invite about 20 people that we would really like to have conversations with. We would get together and spend three or four days and just talk about what we wanted to talk about; what each of us were doing, ideas, the politics of the therapeutic world. We had the first one here in Galveston and of course when news got out that we're doing this, more than 20 people wanted to come. I don't remember, were you at that one, Diana?

D: No, at the others, but not that one.

H: We had them at the old Holiday Inn and of course all social activities were at Harry and [his wife] Leslie's house. We continued to have the Galveston symposiums about every other year for a while, and even had at least two and maybe three after Harry died. By this time we were up to numbers in the 90s. It was just a little overwhelming, and it became something other than what we had wanted it to be, though for most who participated many long-term connections and inspirations came from these gatherings.

J: Like I said, those groups became legendary.

H: They were on what I call the residential, or 24/7 time. All stayed at the same hotel, had all our meals together and socials at Harry's house every evening. You are sort of eating and sleeping, drinking and talking, with everybody in the same place, so the conversations just continued. They just never stopped. One of the things that I do now with my trainings is to continue in that tradition of hospitality and conversation

J: That's a real bonus to have a small group.

H: Absolutely, I call it a luxury.

J: Sometimes it's important to be with like-minded people.

H: Yes, the same ballpark of ideas. Then, of course you can have sparking conversations, just because those are important. They push you to think. They push you to help clarify, and sometimes they push you to leave something on the side and walk away from it. Tensions and differences are very, very important to be there for newness to emerge; otherwise things risk being static and perhaps boring.

J: I'd like to get back to what you said when we started the conversation about differences being experienced as sparking points of learning, rather than being interpreted as conflict. It's important to unpack that a bit more. Can you say more about that?

H: The notion of differences became very important. Maybe not so purposefully influenced by Bateson, but influenced by clinical work and noticing the differences

when we were working with families. Each person would have a different story, a different version of the cause of the difficult situation for which they were seeking consultation, for instance, who is the problem, what the problem was, what should the relationship be? Early on, like a tradition in family therapy. Typically, we would try to come up with the best problem definition. Then we would try to get everyone to agree on what the problem was, what the solution would be, and what they were going to do to achieve the solution. In listening carefully to each family member's story, we realized that there was richness in the differences. I began to think that a family doesn't have a story, but rather every storytelling is a multiple collection of stories. It is collective storytelling. I've written about it using that term. Not that one version is more accurate or important than the others, but that each story is that person's perception of the situation. So, the question is, what can we do while we're walking within or swimming within these different versions of stories.

J: So, you're saying that the different stories bring richness, texture, and possibility. Then the question is, how does the therapist participate in these multiple storytellings? I can't imagine how a world of sameness and agreement is going to get anywhere useful.

H: No, I don't think so. It would be good if politicians could figure that out.

D: I was just thinking that.

H: They really need to be able to explore things and to have their views challenged and questioned.

J: Who would you say, in terms of philosophical or theoretical value, really contributes to that notion of difference in your own experience?

H: Well, certainly early on then, it would be Bateson. Then of course, any time I reread anything he has written, or someone who has written about his work, I think that not anyone that I can readily identify right now really focuses on differences. But, I can think of people who have the ability to walk within multiple realities and remain curious about multiple realities without favoring one over another. Certainly, people such as Lynn Hoffman and Tom Andersen have that ability. John Shotter is probably the most influential person right now in terms of his ideas and reading his ideas that he develops through his study and interpretations of others' writings. Though others might identify him as a social psychologist I think of him as a philosopher who challenges and invites us to think.

J: What has Lynn Hoffman's contributed to your own understanding of difference? What stands out for you in her work?

H: I think Lynn has always been able to see things from multiple angles and never hone in, or focus on, or be married to, any one particular angle, but to remain curious and move around all of those angles. I don't think she so much uses the language in her writings of differences, or addressed the notion of differences, but for me it would be there.

J: . . . because she travels in those multiple perspectives.

H: I think she travels within those multiple perspectives and she is a very curious person. She is a humble person, which I think might be connected to

being able to entertain differences, as well as being able to have one's own difference questioned.

J: . . . so, a not-knowing stance, being a humble person, not taking the center of the conversation?

H: Yes, I would say they are all connected, not being in the center, not needing to be in the center.

J: . . . not needing to be in the center.

H: I don't mean that in a selfish way, but I think that theoretically there are often these theoretically influenced scripts that place the therapist in the center, that the therapist is the expert, that you are in the center because people are depending on you to be the expert. They are asking you to tell them what the problem is. Tell them what to do. "What would you do if this was your child?" Not only the professional, but the profession, has culturally influenced the general public, and the people that we work with and meet in our work expect us to be experts and expect us to be in the center. They expect us to orchestrate and have the answers, to have the ideas and to know.

J: This idea of needing to know is fascinating, isn't it? It's also fascinating how much some of the issues we are faced with are so culturally generated and sustained. I've been part of therapy teams and training groups when typically a 9-year-old boy would be referred for service. Then, before he even arrived for the first session and set foot in the building, the group of mental health professionals would decide that he had ADHD. Isn't that interesting, how the diagnosis can arrive in the building before the actual person? This need to "know" and reach "certainty" centers the mental health professional.

H: From teachers, parents, or the referring person, they have learned this from the professional people. Just pick up almost any magazine or watch a TV talk show and there is often something about ADHD. Now the big thing is adult ADHD, and people are coming in with their own diagnoses of whatever the popular diagnosis is of the time. That gets into this idea of treating a diagnosis, treating symptoms, treating someone that you've never met before the same way that you've probably been trying to treat other people. The idea of even using the word *treat*. I don't like that word.

J: I'm curious to talk with you about another area that stands out for me in your work with Harry Goolishian—that is, the huge contribution the two of you made by understanding therapy as a conversation. Looking back, what influenced the two of you to explore the domain of conversation? What particular literature were you engaged with? What particular people would you say made the most significant contribution in that area of understanding conversation in that way?

H: Okay, I think there are two connections. I'll start with your first one, and then I will add another one. As I mentioned earlier we were very intrigued by work of Bateson and the early work of the MRI group, which often seemed kind of magical. The MRI group would do all these flashy interventions. We were very interested in their ideas about language. We were particularly drawn to Paul Watzlawick's ideas

about language. They used language in a strategic manner. There was an emphasis on learning the client's language. We studied their work and invited each of them to come to Galveston. You know, it was kind of that Galveston style, which I can go back to historically, is the third thing. So we decided we were really going to work hard at trying to learn the client's language. We would work with two therapists in the room. That's what we called them, because we didn't like the idea of co-therapists. Co-therapists typically thought the same and you were both going to try and do the same thing, without having a concept of the importance of differences. This was in the middle to late '70s. We would sit and begin talking with the family and ask a beginning question. We wouldn't ask it to any particular person. We would just pose it and then whoever spoke we would begin talking with that person. We tried to pay very careful attention to learning the family's language. I don't know if this is what you want to hear about, but it's part of where this came from. So, we began to realize several things. One thing was that each person in the family had a different story and a different language. We began to realize that a family didn't have a language. They didn't have a belief. They didn't have a value. They shared certain things in this area, of course. For any group to have some coherence or consistency or continuity over time, that would have to be there. But what caught our attention were these different versions of the story and the nuances in those. So, we began to ask what Harry and I called conversational questions, meaning the question came from the conversation: "So, as I was learning from you about what you wanted to say about your family and why you're here, etc., we began to be very curious about your version of the story." We were not asking questions that we thought we "should" be asking or that were prepared ahead of time or to collect information or data. We were really asking questions out of curiosity to learn. So, we begin to think that the conversation itself, the storytelling itself, that if you stayed close to it, the person you were talking to would tell you what to ask, what they wanted you to learn about, and how to participate in the conversation. So following the person's lead and staying close with their story version became very important. We also began to notice that the other members of the family were listening differently. Not that they would hear things that they hadn't heard before, but it was like they indicated that they had heard the familiar in a different way. It was just something about the way the story was told. The content wasn't new. There were no secrets revealed or ideas that people hadn't heard about. They were talking about the same things that they were talking about before, in the therapy room or at home, but somehow our curiosity and questions invited people to talk differently. Both Harry, myself, and our colleagues in the team at the time adopted a slower manner. In other words, we weren't fast paced (snapping fingers), asking the questions. Instead, we gave people time to speak. We gave ourselves time to listen, and time to think about what we heard. We would sometimes pause and talk with each other about something that someone just said, or something we were thinking, or a family member might chime in. So, it became a conversation among all the people in the room. Also, what we would do, going back to starting with one person, is that we would just go around the room, not necessarily literally in order,

but as someone spoke or looked like they were on the edge of their chair wanting to contribute, then we would go to them. We became very interested in language and we began reading about language. That was how we first became interested in [Humberto] Maturana, and this inspired our colleague Paul Dell to go to Colorado one summer, to a Naropa summer meeting for a 6-week-long stay with Maturana. It was after that we invited Maturana to visit and spend some time with us, but it just began to spread in terms of anything we could read about language, and particularly the ideas of language as something being actively constructed.

J: One thing that stood out for me as you were recounting this development was your comment about the use of silence, for example, a pause or a space, as a part of the conversation.

H: We did. I don't think that we were doing that purposefully. It wasn't like a strategic or a tempo thing; I think it was more our style. When it really came to my attention, the importance of pauses, the importance of silence, the very first time was when we went to see Bateson. One of the things that struck me that he said was, like when you asked earlier if there had been any "aha" moments, "I always need at least 7 seconds to think about what I've heard and to prepare my response." Now, these are not his exact words. These are my words for him. I thought, "Oh wow, that's really important: think carefully about what you think you have heard and how you will respond."

J: Imagine the difference it made

H: Yes, to think about what you've heard and how you might respond to have a thoughtful, coherent response. The second time that it really sort of struck me about the importance of these pauses and where I began to write about it the first time was when I went to Norway, the first Scandinavian country I ever visited.

J: When was that, Harlene?

H: That was 1987. I had met Tom Andersen and had been around him and knew their pace, their style, and their way of talking and how they use a lot of provisional language. Like, "I'm wondering . . ." or "Might it be . . ." I was also paying attention to that kind of provisional tentativeness, which, I think is associated with pausing and slowing down. I noticed that in workshops or in a meeting around a table that I might be participating in, that the people seemed to be very considerate of each other and not in a hurry, not in a rush. If someone was talking they gave them time to finish. If someone else wanted to say something, they might often say, "Have you finished? Is there something else you might want to say?" I don't want to say it's politeness, because often I go places and people say, "Well, I know, you're just a Southern lady." Well, I guess I could bristle at that. First of all, I don't think of Texas as the South. And I don't think of myself as a Southern lady. But I do think of myself as a respectful person. I do think that, saying it very simply, good manners are important, and that's a respectful way to be, whatever the good manners are in any one particular culture or context. There's not one way to have good manners. So those things became important.

J: Were those ways of working connected to some sort of ethics or values?

H: All of these ideas and practices are so connected and they don't stand alone. Just from experience, when you have them at the time, or at least I don't really think about it, it doesn't catch my attention. It might be later that I reflect on it. When I was talking about these conversations with families, we would then have two therapists in the room, and then we might pause and I might turn to you and say, "I'm just wondering, as Mom was talking and then Grandmother had this idea, I was wondering what struck you or what are you thinking about that, what are you curious about, what are your ideas?" We would have that kind of pause in the broader conversation, realizing how the other people in the room were listening to what we were saying.

J: Would you say it changed the therapist positioning? Would that contribute to the therapist being less centered?

H: . . . not being so centered, oh, absolutely. I call it listening in a different way. Later on I began to talk and write about the importance and interrelatedness of listening, speaking, and hearing and having time for each of those. As a therapist you initially speak, as an invitation to invite the other person or persons to speak. You're inviting them to be in a speaking position and you're in the listening position. Not only in terms of out-loud conversations, but we also began to realize and really value of the importance of inner talk, of inner conversation. So again, turning to someone, turning to the husband and saying, "I'm wondering what you were thinking as your wife was just talking right now," so inviting into the out-loud conversation any silent inner talk that a person might want to introduce.

J: What do you think would be important for therapists to know to do, or not do, or to think about regarding their own inner talk, their own historical background, everything they're bringing into the room?

H: Well, first of all, I say to beginning therapists that if you are very occupied by your own inner talk, you are probably slipping into monologue. Then you're not listening to, or hearing, or understanding what the other person is hoping you will understand, because you're not really participating in the conversation silently, or out loud.

J: . . . so you're kind of swimming in your own internal talk.

H: Yeah, and this is kind of coming in the side door, but one of the things that I used to do when I was involved on a more day-to-day basis in the training at the [Houston Galveston] Institute with the interns who would come: I would often be very provocative, because the philosophy that Harry and I always had, and I think it's still there at the Houston Galveston Institute, is that learning theoretically and practically go hand-in-hand. For instance, most typically you attend courses, you study the theory, and then later you practice it. We prefer that it happens together, so that you have the reflexive nature of experiences and the ideas. The first day, new learners arrive at the Institute anxious to meet their clients. We would have them meet with clients right away. We would have them see clients in pairs to help them have support and reassurance. We would say, "Okay, now this is the family that's coming in and we really don't know anything about them, except what the

referral person wanted us to know about them.” I would say to the new learners, “I totally trust you can meet with this family, however, I am going to give you two instructions. First of all, I want you to, not by any means, do any therapy. And, in conjunction with that, I do not want you by any means to try and be a therapist. What I want you to do is to go in that room and sit down with this family and meet them and learn about them and let them learn a little bit about you. Begin to find a way to be together; you don’t have to think in terms of the questions to ask, that’s not important. You’re not there to gather information, or data, or to fill out any kind of forms, or to create a report. This is all we want you to do—have a conversation, begin to develop a relationship.” My idea was that in graduate school therapists are trained, as you were saying, when we first started meeting with clients that we need to be a particular kind of person when you go into the therapy room. And you are told this is the kind of person you have to be and this is the way you talk and this is the way you dress and this is the kinds of questions you ask and the kinds of information you need. In other words, perform a role and follow a script. I wanted them to be able to, without saying it directly, or being critical of the graduate program that “You know sometimes because of graduate school and the expectations that you have of yourself you lose your ability to be natural—to be ‘yourself’ and to be natural and spontaneous. That’s what we’re going to focus on. Just be able to sit down and relax and don’t be nervous. We’re not going to videotape you. We’re not going to watch you through the mirror. Just go in there and if you think you don’t know what to do, you probably don’t know what to do. But that’s okay. You don’t need that. Right now you need to develop a relationship with the people in the family and find a way to be together with them.”

J: What did that contribute to the students learning? What do you think they would say now if they could comment on that instruction?

H: I think it was a gentle introduction to not being expert, and not knowing, and to be more comfortable with themselves, and be able to be more spontaneous. Down the road they would learn to do what I call “do what the occasion calls for” and be prepared to turn on a dime. (Looks at Diana) I can tell that Diana has something that she wants to say.

J: Yes, sure, I appreciate that. I do want to turn to Diana and will do so in just a moment. It seems to me that this also represents a clarifying of important values. I remember seeing an interview with Ray Charles the year before he died. The interviewer asked a great question. He said, “When you first started playing, and now many years later, what would you say is different about your music?” Ray Charles said, “Well, I use a lot less notes and there’s a lot more space in between them. It’s much better music.”

(Shared laughter)

H: Interesting, that’s a good quote. We need to write that down.

J: Well, you will have it in the interview.

H: I think that’s really, really good and as you’re talking about public figures I was just thinking also of Barbara Walters. I used to really admire Barbara Walters. I

thought she's so composed, she is so clever, and she is so smart. You can tell she really did her homework before she met someone. And of course, those were called interviews in that journalistic sense. I certainly did not want to model her provocativeness.

J: She was artful at it.

H: Very artful. Again, how can you be different, or introduce a difference in a respectful way, or in what I call a gentle way. This whole notion of confrontation is so important for most therapists. Too many therapists think you have to confront people to face the reality of the situation.

J: The "reality."

D: Their denial.

H: The reality of the situation. You have to confront that denial. You have to confront that substance abuse.

D: Like that works.

J: I like when Leonard Cohen takes that on when he said, "I tried to fight the bottle but I had to do it drunk."

H: I like Leonard Cohen.

J: Diana, is it a good time to ask you some questions? Is that okay with you, Harlene?

H: Sure. Yes, it looks like she has some thoughts.

J: Can I ask you a couple questions?

D: Okay, go ahead. I'm in.

J: I'm curious, what grabbed your attention or stood out for you as you were listening to this conversation?

D: Well, two things grabbed me. First, I have a new idea every time I hear Harlene speak, and I've heard her speak many times. I always learn something, even after all these years. I'm always reminded of something, or I hear something differently, which, is I guess the whole point of the theory. That it's never the same conversation.

H: . . . and hopefully I've said it slightly differently.

D: Well, whether you have or haven't, I heard it differently. The other thing that surprised me is, when you were talking about the history and you were asking Harlene about the people that influenced her, I found myself feeling very emotional. I'm thinking, what is that about? I'm still not sure. Except, I knew many of these people, and I was sort of reliving how it was. I was like a kid in a candy store. I mean, I knew how lucky I was at that time. I think that a lot of new therapists don't understand. Like you were saying, Jim—the legacy in the history. I was living it with these people in a much different way, because I was a student. But, it was just my good fortune to have been in that time. So, I found myself feeling almost tearful.

J: When you were listening to the history and those contributions, what particular spots were more interesting?

D: Well, gosh, I'm trying to think. It was somewhere after you were asking Harlene about the people that influenced her at that time. These are my words, not Harlene's. These were people that had their own ideas, and they weren't just like your ideas, but they were nonjudgmental and they were not arrogant. I'm thinking

about Gianfranco Cecchin and Luigi. Those are wonderful memories. We didn't meet them very often. They were just so engaging. I did my dissertation on hypothesis formation, the Milan model. We don't really practice that way anymore. But, it was okay to move on without disengaging from them as people.

J: . . . without disengaging as people?

D: It's like when you two were talking about whether you are teaching theory, doing therapy, or just having a conversation with a friend or colleague, you stay close to the same values.

J: So, at that point you experienced yourself getting emotional, or there was a particular connection, or a resonance.

D: There was. I have to think about it, what that was, because it was surprising to me that it was nice, it felt good.

J: There was a strong, but pleasant response.

D: Pleasant emotional response. I really don't know; I have to think about it.

J: Sure, can I come back to you later on that?

H: I'm thinking of a lot of really good memories of people that we met and experiences that we had together.

D: Like the epistemology conference with Jill and Gene and the symposium we had at the ranch before an AAMFT [American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy] conference in Dallas. You know, that dude ranch.

H: Oh yeah, yeah.

D: Remember the Galveston symposium and Hoffman did the rolling conversations? These are things I haven't thought of in many years that have been so influential.

J: Were those great days?

D: Yes, and maybe there's sadness because it feels like they're not anymore.

J: . . . you experience a sadness that you miss those days in a sense?

D: Not that I miss them, that they won't come again.

H: . . . that they come in different ways.

D: Certainly, they come in different ways. But, the world is so different and family therapy isn't new anymore. I mean, it was new and it can't be new again. We have new ideas, and new developments, and it can't be new like it was new back then. That is why it is good to have these relationships.

H: Then again, I go back to things are changing. They always do. Change is part of my world. I have these kinds of experiences differently now, not in organized ways. I might go to Denmark to work in a university for two-day workshop and the host invites me to dinner the night before. The rich kind of conversation we have there are different kinds, but there's a communal exchange and development of ideas and practices. It's not that someone or some one group of persons rises to the top and everyone else looks toward them as having answers. But now there's more of this communal kind of inclusiveness. There's at least, in the ideas and practices that I'm interested in, sort of a broad international community. I think that people are contributing to it in various ways. There are almost anonymous teams

out there, doing really interesting, creative work. But they don't do workshops. They don't write. I'm interested in how to invite them to think more thoughtfully, and share and talk about the work. How to make their creativity and contributions a little more public. So, those are the kinds of things that really interest and inspire me now. Of course, in terms of people, I mentioned John Shotter. I love to listen to him talk and to be in conversations with him.

D: I want to comment on this idea of inclusiveness. Because you said something about Southern hospitality and that you didn't like it.

H: Being called a Southern lady.

D: Yeah.

H: It's usually in a pejorative way.

D: Right, but I was thinking about it in a very good way. My mother raised me that way too. That's probably one reason why we connect. That culture values including people and inviting people. I think that is really important. You do that with great intent. I think you've made me more aware of that. I think I'm that way, but I forget when I get caught up in something. You reminded me in many workshops to set the stage.

J: So, welcoming in the middle and in ending, not ending in an essentialist sort of way.

D: That's why I pointed it out, because it's not an ending. It's always a continuing relationship. How can we continue to connect?

J: Harlene, how's that fitting for what you understand?

H: Preparing is very important. Not planning. Inspired by John Shotter I make a distinction between the two, planning and preparing. I think setting the stage, initially the way you meet and greet people is critically important. I want to signal to people in whatever way possible, in my words, in my body, to my clients that I respect them, that they are important, and that I'm interested in them. That's something that you have to attend to throughout the relationship. Whether it's a therapy relationship, or not. I don't think in terms of a beginning, middle, or the ending of therapy. But that it's everything that needs continually attending to.

J: . . . not a theory of arrival, its constant movement?

H: It's something you have to constantly attend to. It's not so intentional, but it's more natural and spontaneous. If there's certain ways of being and becoming with others, that *has* to be there. If you want people to be creative and imaginative, then you want to invite that by being it yourself.

J: Caroline, you've been quiet through the whole conversation. I wonder if that helped you to remain in a reflective position. So, what struck you, what caught your attention in this conversation?

CAROLINE: Well, many things. But, the thing that really stood out for me, Harlene, was when you were talking about your parents, and how they were acting with other people. What it got me thinking about was the social implication. Because they did things in a different way, particularly when you said they would go pick up your housekeeper, and then she rode sitting in the front seat. When you

mentioned that, it got me wondering, well, is that not the way it was done back then, your housekeeper wouldn't ride in the front seat?

H: Not anywhere in the state. It was always in the back seat.

C: So, your parents did things differently that had social implications. That really stood out for me. Then when I hear you talk about the work that you've done, and all that history that you are talking about, what I'm hearing is that same act of taking a stance socially. But it was in a different way from the common, more dominant way of doing things. I was also struck by how introducing conversations as something that's important, that has to do with bringing people in, as opposed to being the experts and doing therapy to people. I also caught onto the idea that invitational language is a big part of it. That got me reflecting on today. What is it today that is the equivalent of putting the housekeeper in the front seat of the car, because it's a different world? You said it—it's a different world. We're all connected around the world. Fifty or sixty years ago it was different. What's different now? It left me wondering. So, today what is it I can do that that would be the equivalent of putting someone in the front seat of the car? I hear a lot of things, I see a lot of things being done that need to be called into question. So, it gets me thinking about how to do that from an invitational posture.

J: Thank you, Caroline. Is there anything else at this moment from either of you that may have stood out or resonated for you?

D: I got a lot but it would be a whole other interview.

J: It's called the editing process.

H: He'll just edit you out, but at least you're able to say it and we were able to hear it.

Caroline, when you are talking about the political thing, one of the critiques that I've often heard or seen in writings commenting on my work, and my colleagues' work, is that we don't take a political position. How can you not take a political position? Everything you do has an ethical position. Everything you do is a political position. We just don't focus on it, or advertise it. All of my life, and certainly all of my work at the medical school [University of Texas Medical Branch-Galveston], was working with what were then called disadvantaged people.

D: Absolutely.

J: So, what if those people did comment in that way? I have heard those comments as well. People have made comments like, "The conversation can't just remain within the walls of the therapy room."

H: I think that there were some people that were really focusing on feminist family therapy, and that therapists have to be an agent of change. A therapist can't be an agent of change. You can't change somebody else, or a group of people, or groups of ideas. You can have influence on them, as they will have on you. I have never taken that position. I think that everything you do in a therapy room is influenced by all of these broader political things and that is always the backdrop in which you are working. You have to be aware of it. It's like you say, the therapy conversation is not just in the therapy room. It is not this kind of isolated, or secret,

or sacred event, but it's part of previous present or part of future conversations. Also, the so-called political movements that have happened in family therapy are from an expert position and are from privileged people thinking they know better how someone else can be less disadvantaged or can have more of a voice.

J: . . . from a class position?

H: Yes, from a class position. I have seen and heard people speak, and read their words, of which I thought, you are doing exactly what you are preaching against: you are being oppressive.

J: Harlene, I have appreciated Part I of our conversation so far and have enjoyed reengaging history with you.

H: Jim, one more thing. I realize that I have been talking about and re-creating early history up until around 1980, with the focus on the early days of the Galveston group and the Galveston Family Institute or GFI. So much has happened in the 35 years since then. GFI is now the Houston Galveston Institute, and there has been a continuous evolution and reflexive process of assumptions and practices, including what I call them.

J: Thanks for making that distinction for the readership and that your work and the work of Houston Galveston Institute has continued to evolve through time.

Note to readers: Stay tuned for part II of this conversation with Harlene Anderson as we reflect on her relationship with Harry Goolishian and his contribution to her personal and professional life and her contribution to his.

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